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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 000783

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S LUNCHEON WITH PRESIDENT CIAMPI

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR MEL SEMBLER FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: IN A PRIVATE LUNCHEON, ITALIAN PRESIDENT CIAMPI EXPRESSED HIS DEEP CONCERN OVER A DETERIORATING SITUATION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS. HE MADE A DETAILED ARGUMENT THAT ITALY CAN AND MUST BE BOTH PRO EUROPE AND PRO US, WITH WHICH I AGREED. CIAMPI WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE  
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TO VISIT WASHINGTON FOR A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BUSH; I STRONGLY SUPPORT THIS. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) ITALIAN PRESIDENT CARLO AZEGLIA CIAMPI INVITED ME TO A PRIVATE LUNCHEON FEB 12. TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, IT WAS THE FIRST TIME HE HAS EXTENDED SUCH AN INVITATION TO ANY AMBASSADOR. THE DCM AND ANTONIO PURI PURINI, THE PRESIDENT'S DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR, ALSO ATTENDED, ALONG WITH PRESIDENCY SECRETARY GENERAL GIFUNI.

3. (C) CIAMPI DESCRIBED ITALY'S RELATIONS WITH THE US AS "FUNDAMENTAL". HOWEVER GOOD THE RELATIONS WITH THE US ARE, ADDED CIAMPI, THEY MUST GO, IN LARGE PART, VIA THE EU. THIS SAID, ITALY'S RELATIONS WITH THE EU AND WITH THE US ARE NOT IN COMPETITION. I SAID THAT THE US UNDERSTOOD THE IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG EUROPE AND SUPPORTED IT. DURING LAST WEEK'S VISIT TO ROME, NATO AMB. NICK BURNS UNDERLINED HOW MUCH WE APPRECIATED THE LEADERSHIP ITALY IS BRINGING TO NATO, AND THE ACTIVE ROLE ITALY PLAYS IN THE BALKANS AND IN AFGHANISTAN. ITALY'S RELATIONS WITH THE EU DO NOT THREATEN ITS TIES WITH THE US.

4. (C) CIAMPI DWELT ON ITALY'S SPECIAL INTEREST IN ITS IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS IN THE BALKANS, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA. SOUND WESTERN INVESTMENT AND ASSISTANCE IN THOSE REGIONS NOT ONLY REDUCES THE PRESSURE FOR EMIGRATION TO EUROPE, BUT ALSO UNDERMINES THE INFLUENCE OF FUNDAMENTALISM. HE NOTED THAT HE RECENTLY HAD TOLD BOTH KOSOVO LEADER RUGOVA AND MONTENEGRIN PRESIDENT DJUKANOVIC THAT ITALY OPPOSES INDEPENDENCE FOR THOSE ENTITIES. A NEW CROP OF BALKAN "MINI-STATES" IS IN NO ONE'S INTEREST; THEY WOULD BE  
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OFFSHOOTS OF THE "MALIGNANT SEED OF NATIONALISM."

5. (C) ON THE MIDDLE EAST, CIAMPI EXPRESSED HIS DEEP CONCERN OVER THE DETERIORATING SITUATION IN GENERAL AND SHARON'S APPROACH IN PARTICULAR. I EMPHASIZED THAT PRESIDENT BUSH IS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE SITUATION, AND THAT HE WOULD LIKE THE EU AND THE US TO SPEAK WITH A SINGLE VOICE ON THE MIDDLE EAST: THE VIOLENCE MUST STOP; AND THEN THE PEACE PROCESS CAN RESTART. CIAMPI SAID THAT THE US IS THE ONLY POWER ABLE OF BRINGING BOTH PARTIES TOGETHER, BUT ADMITTED THAT IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO DO SO UNDER THE CURRENT ATMOSPHERE OF VIOLENCE.

6. (C) CIAMPI, NOW IN HIS THIRD YEAR AS PRESIDENT, SAID THAT THE ONLY OFFICIAL VISIT HE HAD EVER MADE TO WASHINGTON WAS IN SEPTEMBER 1993 WHEN HE WAS PRIME MINISTER. PURI PURINI SAID THAT CIAMPI WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO AGREE ASAP ON A DATE FOR A VISIT TO WASHINGTON, IDEALLY THIS FALL. I REPLIED THAT SURELY IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE TO HAVE A STATE VISIT, BUT AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION WITH PRESIDENT BUSH WOULD BE VALUABLE. CIAMPI SAID IT WAS NOT IMPORTANT THAT IT BE A STATE VISIT, AS LONG AS HE COULD HAVE A SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION WITH THE PRESIDENT, AS THEY DID LAST JULY IN ROME. HE ADDED THAT HE VERY MUCH APPRECIATES THE PRESIDENT'S "HUMANITY, COMPASSION, AND STRAIGHTFORWARD APPROACH".

7. (C) COMMENT: CIAMPI REMAINS FAR AND AWAY THE MOST POPULAR POLITICIAN IN ITALY (ACCORDING TO SOME POLLS, HE IS MORE POPULAR THAN SUCH VENERABLE INSTITUTIONS AS THE CARABINIERI AND THE CHURCH). HE IS RESPECTED NOT ONLY AS THE ARCHITECT OF ITALY'S ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN THE 1990S, BUT ALSO FOR  
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THE CRUCIAL ROLE HE PLAYS IN STABILIZING ITALY'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES. THAT THE HEAD OF STATE OF A MAJOR AND STEADFAST NATO ALLY HAS NOT YET BEEN INVITED TO WASHINGTON IS AN ANOMALY THAT SHOULD BE CORRECTED. I STRONGLY SUPPORT A VISIT TO WASHINGTON THIS FALL AS A RECOGNITION OF ITALY'S STRONGLY SUPPORTIVE ROLE IN THE WAR ON TERRORISM, AND AS A VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PRESIDENT TO ENGAGE WITH A KEY

OPINION SHAPER IN ITALY. END COMMENT.  
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